

Remarks in Lakeland, Florida
October 23, 2004

The President. Thank you all for coming.

Audience members. Four more years!
Four more years! Four more years!

The President. Thank you all for coming today. Laura and I are so honored that so many came out to say hello. We really appreciate it. It is a beautiful day to be campaigning in the great State of Florida. Of course, according to your Governor, every day is a beautiful day in Florida.

I'm here to ask for your vote, and I'm here to ask for your help. We're close to voting time. As a matter of fact, in your State, voting time is already here. Please go to your friends and neighbors, people from all parties—don't overlook discerning Democrats—[laughter]—people like Zell Miller. They want a better country too. Tell them we have a duty in this country to vote. Tell them we have an obligation in a free society to go to the polls. And when you get them headed to the polls, remind them, if they want a safer America and a stronger America and a better America, to put me and Dick Cheney back in office.

I think it's important to go around this country telling people what you're going to do. I'm here to tell you why I think you need to put me in office for 4 more years. But perhaps the most important reason of all is so that Laura is the First Lady for 4 more years.

Audience members. Laura! Laura! Laura!

The President. I'm sure some of you all will appreciate this, when I tell you that Laura and I knew each other in the seventh grade in San Jacinto Junior High in Midland, Texas. We became reacquainted. She was a public school librarian at the time. I said, "Will you marry me?" She said, "Fine, so long as you make me a promise." I said, "What is it?" She said, "I never want to have to give a political speech." [Laughter] I said, "Okay, you got a deal." Fortunately, she didn't hold me to that

deal. She is giving a lot of speeches, and when she speaks, the American people see a compassionate, warm, strong First Lady.

I'm proud of my runningmate, Dick Cheney. He's doing a great job. I see some others out here who are follically challenged. [Laughter] See, I admit he doesn't have the waviest hair in the race. [Laughter] You'll be pleased to hear I didn't pick him because of his hairdo. [Laughter] I picked him because he can get the job done. I picked him because of his judgment. I picked him because of his experience.

I'm proud to be traveling with my brother. Jeb Bush is a great Governor for Florida. He's led with conviction. You know, one thing about him, you don't have to worry about where he stands. In other words, he's not one of these politicians who is going to take a poll or run a focus group, trying to figure out what to tell you. He stands on principles. That's how we were raised. You stand for what you believe. And Jeb showed great courage and compassion during the times of these storms. I came over to try to lend a hand and show the people of this important State that the Federal Government cared, people around the country cared for you. But I was incredibly impressed by two things, one, Jeb's leadership, and two, the great compassion of the people of Florida.

I'm proud to be up here with Adam Putnam. I call him Red; you call him Congressman. [Laughter] We went over and saw some orange growers the other day, and it was my honor to be in that citrus grove, telling the orange growers of this part of the State, we're going to help them get their feet back on the ground.

I want to thank—listen, while you're out there voting, voting for me and Dick Cheney, make sure you vote for Mel Martinez for the United States Senate. He'll be a

fine United States Senator, no doubt in my mind.

I want to thank Lieutenant Governor Toni Jennings for being here. I want to thank the State Senate majority whip. I want to thank all the local and State officials who are here.

I want to thank Trini Triggs for performing for you all.

I want to thank the grassroots activists, the people putting up the signs, the people making the phone calls, the people who have encouraged this rally. I want to thank you for what you've done. I want to thank you for what you're going to do. With your help, we will carry Florida and win a great victory in November.

We just got 10 days to go in the campaign. Who's counting? The voters have a clear choice between two very different candidates with dramatically different approaches and records. You know where I stand. And sometimes, you even know where my opponent stands. We both have records. We both have records.

Audience members. Flip-flop! Flip-flop! Flip-flop!

The President. We both have records. I'm proudly running on mine. And the Senator is running from his, and there's a reason why. There is a mainstream in American politics, and Senator John Kerry sits on the far left bank. I'm a compassionate conservative and proudly so. At a time when our country has much to accomplish and much more to do, I offer a record of reform and results, and my opponent offers a long list of out-of-the-mainstream votes.

This election comes down to five clear choices for American families, five choices on issues of great consequence: your family's security; your family's budget; your quality of life; your retirement; and the bedrock values that are so critical to our families and our future.

The first choice is the most important because it concerns the security of your family. All progress on any of the other

issues depends on the safety of our citizens. This will be the first Presidential election since September the 11th, 2001. Americans will go to the polls in a time of war and ongoing threats unlike any* we have seen before. The terrorists who killed thousands are still dangerous, and they are determined to strike again. The outcome of this election will set the direction of the war against terrorism.

I believe the most solemn duty of the American President, the most solemn duty, is to protect the American people. If America shows uncertainty or weakness, the world will drift toward tragedy. This will not happen on my watch.

Since that terrible morning, September the 11th, 2001, we've fought the terrorists across the Earth, not for pride, not for power, but because the lives of our citizens are at stake. Our strategy is clear. We're strengthening the homeland. We're reforming our intelligence services. We are transforming our All-Volunteer Army. We will not have a draft. We are staying on the offensive against these terrorists. We are relentless and we are determined, and our strategy is paying off. More than three-quarters of Al Qaida's key members and associates have been brought to justice, and the rest of them know we're on their trail.

My opponent has a different approach. He says that September the 11th, quote, "didn't change me much at all," end quote.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. And that's pretty clear. He considers the war on terror primarily a law enforcement and intelligence gathering operation.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. His top foreign policy adviser questioned it is even a war at all, saying, "It's just like a metaphor, like the war on poverty." Anyone who thinks we're fighting a metaphor does not understand the enemy we face. You cannot win a war

* White House correction.

if you are not convinced we are even in one.

Senator Kerry also misunderstands our battle against insurgents and terrorists in Iraq. After voting to authorize force against Saddam Hussein, after calling it the right decision when I sent troops into Iraq, the Senator now calls it the “wrong war.”

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. The Senator used to recognize that Saddam Hussein was a gathering threat who hated America. After all, he said so. He used to recognize that Saddam was a state sponsor of terror with a history of pursuing and even using weapons of mass destruction. After all, he said so. He used to understand that Saddam was a major source of instability in the Middle East. After all, he said so. And when he voted to authorize force, the Senator must have recognized the nightmare scenario that terrorists might somehow gain access to weapons of mass destruction. Senator Kerry seems to have forgotten all of that as his position has evolved during the course of this campaign. You might call it election amnesia. [*Laughter*] I know then and I know now that the world and America are safer with Saddam Hussein sitting in a prison cell.

Senator Kerry now calls Iraq a “diversion.” But the case of just one terrorist shows how wrong his thinking is. A man named Zarqawi is responsible for the car bombs and beheading Americans in Iraq. He ran a terrorist training camp in Afghanistan until coalition troops arrived. He then ran to Iraq, where he’s fighting today. He supports and swore allegiance to Usama bin Laden. If Zarqawi and his associates were not busy fighting American forces and Iraqi forces in Iraq, what does my opponent think he’d be doing, a peaceful businessman somewhere? Leading a benevolence campaign? [*Laughter*] Of course not. Our troops will defeat them there so we do not have to face them in our own cities.

The choice in this election could not be clearer when it comes to the security of

our families. You cannot lead our Nation to decisive victory, on which the security of every American family depends, if you do not see the true dangers of a post-September the 11th world. My opponent has a September 10th point of view. You might remember, at his convention he declared that his strategy would be to respond to attacks after America is hit.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. That would be too late. In our debates, he said we can defend America only if we pass a “global test.”

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. I’m not making that up. He was standing right there when he said it. I work with our friends and allies. We will strengthen our coalitions. But I will never turn over America’s national security decisions to leaders of other countries.

I saw some of our troops coming in. I want to thank them for their service. I want to thank the veterans who are here for having set such a great example for those who wear the uniform. I want to thank our military families who are here for supporting our troops fighting for freedom and security. And I want to assure you your loved ones will have the full support of our Government.

That’s why I went to Congress and asked for \$87 billion of supplemental funding. This was money to support our troops in harm’s way. When you’re out gathering up the vote, I want you to remind your fellow citizens of this startling statistic. There were 4 Members in the United States Senate—only 4 out of 100—that voted to authorize the use of force and then voted against funding for our troops in harm’s way. And four of those—two of those four were my opponent and his runningmate.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. They asked him about that vote. He said, “I actually did vote for the 87 billion, right before I voted against it.” You know—I bet you don’t hear many people talking like that around the coffee shops here. They pressed him even further, and

he finally just threw up his hands. He said, "The whole thing is a complicated matter." My fellow Americans, there is nothing complicated about supporting our troops in combat.

And to protect America, we will lead the cause of freedom. I believe in the transformational power of liberty. I want the youngsters here to understand what has taken place in a short period of time. Afghanistan was once ruled by the Taliban. Young girls couldn't go to school. If their mothers didn't toe the ideological line of the haters, they'd be whipped in the public squares and sometime shot in the stadiums. Because we acted in our own self-defense, millions of Afghan citizens went to the polls to vote for the President, and the first voter was a 19-year-old woman. Freedom is on the march. Freedom is precious. Freedom is powerful. And we're better off for it.

Iraq will have Presidential elections in January. Think how far that country has come from the days of torture chambers and the brutality of Saddam Hussein. Fifty million people now live in freedom because we acted to secure ourselves. We're more secure. The world is better off as freedom is on the march. I believe everybody yearns to be free in this world. Freedom is not America's gift to the world; freedom is the Almighty God's gift to each man and woman in this world.

The second clear choice in this election concerns your family budget, your wallet. When I ran for President 4 years ago, I pledged to lower taxes for American families. I have kept my word. We raised the child credit. We reduced the marriage penalty. The Tax Code ought to encourage marriage, not penalize marriage. We created a 10-percent bracket to help working families. We reduced income taxes for everybody who pays taxes. We're helping our small-business owners. And as a result of these policies, real after-tax income, the money in your pocket, is up by about 10 percent since I got into office.

Think about what this economy has been through. Tell your friends and neighbors what we have overcome. Six months prior to my arrival, the stock market was in serious decline, indicating the recession that came. Then we had some corporate scandals. And then we got attacked, and those attacks cost us about a million jobs in the 3 months after September the 11th.

Our economic policies are working. They've led us back to growth. Our economy is growing at rates as fast as any in nearly 20 years. We've added more than 1.9 million new jobs since August of 2003. The unemployment rate is 5.4 percent, lower than the average of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Farm income is up. Homeownership rates are at an alltime high. The unemployment rate in Florida is 4.5 percent. We're moving forward, and we're not going to go back to the old days.

My opponent has very different plans for your budget. He intends to take a big chunk out of it.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. When I proposed the tax relief to help our families and get this economy going again, he voted against the higher child tax credit. He voted against the marriage penalty relief. He voted against lower taxes. He voted against the help to small businesses. If he had had his way, the average middle-class family in America would have been paying \$2,000 more in Federal income taxes.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. It's part of a pattern. The Senator has voted 10 times to raise gasoline taxes since he's been in the Senate. And all told, during his 20 years in the United States Senate, my opponent has voted 98 times to raise taxes.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. Think about that. That's about five times every year he served. When a Senator does something that often, he must really enjoy it. [Laughter]

During this campaign, he's made a lot of big promises. As a matter of fact, he's

promised about \$2.2 trillion in new spending. That's with a "T." [Laughter] That's a lot even for a Senator from Massachusetts. [Laughter] So they said, "How are you going to pay for it?" He said, "Oh, we'll just tax the rich." We've heard that before, haven't we?

By running up the top two brackets, guess who he's taxing? He's taxing job creators. Seventy percent of new jobs are created by small businesses in America. Most small businesses pay tax at the individual income-tax level. It's a bad idea to tax the job creators in this country.

Raising the top two brackets will raise between 600 and 800 billion dollars, so as you can tell, there's a tax gap. There's a difference between what he has promised and what he can deliver. Now, you know who gets to fill that tax gap, don't you? I'll tell you one other thing about taxing the rich. The rich, during tax time, hire lawyers and accountants for a reason: to slip the tab and to stick you with the bill. We're not going to let him tax you; we're going to carry Florida and win a great victory on November the 2d.

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. The third clear choice in this election involves the quality of life for our families. A good education and quality health care are important for a successful life. When I ran for President 4 years ago, I promised to end and to challenge the soft bigotry of low expectations in our schools. I kept my word, passed the No Child Left Behind Act, which is a great piece of legislation. It brings high standards to our classrooms and makes our schools accountable to our parents. We're seeing progress. Math and reading scores are rising. We are closing an achievement gap all across America. We will build on these reforms. We'll extend them to our high schools so that no child is left behind in America.

We'll continue to improve life—the life of our families by making health care more

affordable and accessible. We'll expand health savings accounts so small businesses can cover their workers and more families are able to get health care accounts they can manage and call their own. We'll create association health plans so small businesses can join together and buy insurance at the discounts that big companies are able to do. We will help our families in need by expanding community health centers. We'll make sure every child eligible is enrolled in our Government's low-income health insurance program.

And we'll help patients and doctors everywhere by doing something about these frivolous lawsuits that are running up the cost of health care and running good doctors out of practice. I met too many ob-gyns that are having trouble making ends meet, and so they're quitting the practice. I met too many women who are driving miles to get the good health care they need for themselves and their child. And this isn't right for America. You can't be pro-trial-lawyer and pro-doctor and pro-patient at the same time. You have to pick. My opponent made his pick. He put a personal injury trial lawyer on the ticket. I stand for medical liability reform—now.

Senator Kerry has a different point of view on our schools and health care system. Listen, he voted for the No Child Left Behind Act, but now he wants to weaken the accountability standards. He has proposed including measures like teacher attendance to judge whether students can read or write or add and subtract. He voted against health savings accounts. He opposes association health plans that will help our small businesses. He voted 10 times against medical liability reform.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. He can run from his record, but he cannot hide.

Now he's proposing a big Government health care plan that would cause 8 million families to lose private coverage they get at work and have to go onto a Government plan. Eighty percent of the people who get

coverage under his proposal would be enrolled in a Government plan. In one of our debates, he said with a straight face that when it comes to his health care plan, and I quote, "The Government has nothing to do with it." I could barely contain myself when I heard that. *[Laughter]* The Government has a lot to do with it. His plan would move America down the road to Federal control of health care, and that's the wrong road for American families. He can run from his record, but he cannot hide.

In all we do to improve health care, we will make sure decisions are made by doctors and patients, not by officials in Washington, DC.

Fourth clear choice in this election involves your retirement. Our Nation has made a solemn commitment to America's seniors on Social Security and Medicare. When I ran for President 4 years ago, I promised to keep that commitment and improve Medicare by adding prescription drug coverage. I have kept my word. You know, leaders in both political parties have talked about Medicare for years—for years. We got the job done. Seniors are now getting discounts on medicine with drug discount cards. Low-income seniors are getting \$600 on their card this year and 600 next year. And beginning in 2006, all seniors will be able to get prescription drug coverage under Medicare.

My opponent voted against the Medicare bill that included prescription drug coverage, even though it was supported by the AARP and other seniors groups. Later he said, quote, "If I am President, we're going to repeal that phony bill." A little later on, he said, "No, I don't want to repeal it." Kind of sounds familiar. As your President for the next 4 years, I will defend the reforms we have worked so hard to pass and keep the promise of Medicare for our senior citizens.

And we will keep the promise of Social Security for our seniors, and we'll strengthen Social Security for generations to come.

Every election, desperate politicians try to scare our seniors about Social Security. It is predictable, and it's beginning to happen again. I want you to tell your friends and neighbors about what happened in the 2000 campaign. They said, "If George W. gets elected, our seniors will not get their checks." Now, you might remember that. Well, tell them George W. did get elected, and our seniors did get their checks. And our seniors will continue to get their checks, and baby boomers like me are in pretty good shape when it comes to the Social Security trust.

But we need to think about our children and our grandchildren. We need to make sure that when they retire, there's a Social Security system available to meet their needs. And that is why I believe younger workers ought to be allowed to take some of their own money and put it in a personal account. It will earn a better rate of return, a personal account they call their own, a personal account the Government cannot take away.

My opponent is taking a different approach. He talks about protecting Social Security. He's the only candidate in this race that voted to tax Social Security benefits eight times.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. He can run, but he cannot hide. And when it comes to the next generation, he has offered no reform. The job of a President is to confront problems, not to pass them on to future Presidents and future generations. In a new term, I'll bring Republicans and Democrats together to make sure Social Security is around when a younger generation of America needs it.

The fifth clear choice in this election is on the values that are so critical to keeping America's families strong. And my opponent and I are miles apart. I believe marriage is a sacred institution. Marriage is a pillar of our civilization, and I will always defend it. This is not a partisan issue. When Congress passed the Defense of Marriage Act, defining marriage as the

union of a man and a woman, the vast majority of Democrats supported it, and my predecessor, President Bill Clinton, signed it into law. Senator Kerry was part of an out-of-the-mainstream minority that voted against the Defense of Marriage Act.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. I believe that reasonable people can find common ground on the most difficult of issues. Republicans and Democrats and many citizens on both sides of the life issue came together and agreed we should ban the brutal practice of partial-birth abortion. Senator Kerry was part of an out-of-the-mainstream minority that voted against the ban.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. He voted against parental notification laws.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. He voted against the Unborn Victims of Violence Act.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. I'll continue to reach out to Americans of every belief and move this goodhearted Nation toward a culture of life.

My opponent has said that the heart and soul of America can be found in Hollywood.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. I understand most American families do not look to Hollywood as a source of values. The heart and soul of America is found in communities like Lakeland, Florida.

All of these choices make this one of the most important elections in our history. The security and prosperity of our country, the health and education of our families, the retirement of our seniors, and the direction of our culture are all at stake. And

this decision is in the best of hands, because the decision rests with the American people.

I can't tell you how optimistic I am about the future of this country. I see a better day for everybody. You know, one of my favorite quotes was written by a fellow Texan named Tom Lea. He said, "Sarah and I live on the east side of the mountain. It's the sunrise side, not the sunset side. It is the side to see the day that is coming, not the side to see the day that is gone." My opponent has spent much of this campaign talking about the day that is gone. I see the day that is coming.

We've been lot—we've been through a lot together in the last nearly 4 years. Because we've done the hard work of climbing the mountain, we can see the valley below. We'll protect our families and build their prosperity and defend our deepest values. We'll spread freedom in the world and the peace we all want.

Four years ago, when I traveled your State asking for the vote, I pledged to restore honor and dignity to the office to which I had been elected. With your help, I will do so for 4 more years.

God bless. Thank you all. Thank you all. On to victory!

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:55 a.m. at Ty Cobb Field. In his remarks, he referred to Senator Zell Miller of Georgia, who made the keynote address at the 2004 Republican National Convention; Lt. Gov. Toni Jennings of Florida; Paula Dockery, majority whip, Florida State Senate; entertainer Trini Triggs; former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; and senior Al Qaida associate Abu Musab Al Zarqawi.

Remarks in Melbourne, Florida
October 23, 2004

The President. Thanks for coming today.

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. Thank you all. Thanks for coming today. We're getting close to voting time—actually, you already are voting here. We're traveling your State not only asking for the vote, I'm here to ask for your help. I'm asking you to get your friends and neighbors and remind them they have a duty to vote in a democracy. And as you're getting people to do their duty, don't overlook discerning Democrats, people like Senator Zell Miller from Georgia. Remind people that if they want a safer America, a stronger America, and a better America, put me and Dick Cheney back in office.

I really enjoy campaigning. I like to be out with the people. I like to tell people why I'm running and what I intend to do as your President for 4 more years. Perhaps the most important reason of all for you to put me back into office is so that Laura will be the First Lady for 4 more years.

Audience members. Laura! Laura! Laura!

The President. Listen, some of you all may appreciate this—I think some of you will appreciate this. When I asked Laura to marry me—well, we'd been to the seventh grade together at San Jacinto Junior High in Midland, Texas. We became reacquainted later on. She was a public school librarian at the time. And when I asked her to marry me, she said, "Fine, but make me a promise." I said, "What is it?" She said, "Promise me that I'll never have to give a political speech." [*Laughter*] I said, "Okay, you got a deal." Fortunately, she didn't hold me to that promise. [*Laughter*] She is giving a lot of speeches, and when she does, the American people see a compassionate, warm, strong First Lady.

I'm proud of my runningmate, Dick Cheney. I fully admit it, he doesn't have the most hair in the race. [*Laughter*] I didn't

pick him because of his hairdo. I picked him because of his judgment, his experience. He's getting the job done for the American people.

And I'm proud of brother Jeb. The thing I like about him is you know where he stands. He's not one of these people that takes a poll or a focus group to kind of find his way. And not only that, when times were tough here in the State of Florida, I saw firsthand his steady leadership. Though I came and tried to remind the people of this State the Federal Government would do everything we can to help the people, the truth of the matter is, Florida's great strength is not only your Governor but the fact that neighbor loved neighbor, neighbor helped neighbor. Florida showed great character during these times of testing.

I'm honored to call Buzz Aldrin friend. I appreciate him being here today. He's one of the great pioneers of America. I appreciate you, Buzz, coming. I want to thank you for the example you have set for future pioneers.

I want to thank Congressman Dave Weldon for his service to the great State of Florida. I appreciate you being here, Dave. When you go to the polls, make sure you vote for Mel Martinez. He'll make a great United States Senator. I want to thank all the State and local officials who are here. I want to thank my friends in Little Texas for having played for you all today.

Most of all, I want to thank the grassroots activists who are putting up the signs and making the phone calls, who have worked so hard to make this rally such a fantastic rally. I want to thank you for what you have done and what you're going to do, and that is turn out the vote. And with your help, we'll carry Florida again